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# THE BASING RELATION AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE DEBASING DEMON

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Descartes' demon is a *deceiver*: the demon makes things appear to you other than as they really are. However, as Descartes famously pointed out in the Second Meditation, not *all* knowledge is imperilled by this kind of deception. You still know you are a thinking thing. Perhaps, though, there is a more virulent demon in epistemic hell, one from which none of our knowledge is safe. Jonathan Schaffer (2010) thinks so. The "Debasing Demon" he imagines threatens knowledge not via the truth condition on knowledge, but via the basing condition. This demon can cause any belief to seem like it's held on a good basis, when it's really held on a bad basis. Several recent critics (Brueckner (2011), Conee (2015), Ballantyne & Evans (2013)) grant Schaffer the possibility of such a debasing demon, and argue that the skeptical conclusion doesn't follow. By contrast, we argue that on any plausible account of the epistemic basing relation, the "debasing demon" is *impossible*. Our argument for why this is so gestures, more generally, to the importance of avoiding common traps by embracing mistaken assumptions about what it takes for a belief to be based on a reason.

## 1. Introduction

Here is an epistemological platitude: the epistemic basing relation is the relation which obtains between beliefs and the reasons for which they are held, or between beliefs and the considerations or factors on which they are based. Here's another: a proposition  $p$  is justified for a subject  $S$  just in case  $S$  possesses good epistemic reasons for believing  $p$ , whether or not  $S$  believes  $p$  on that basis (or indeed, whether  $S$  believes  $p$  at all), while  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is doxastically justified (i.e.  $S$ 's belief is held in an epistemically permissible fashion) if and only if  $S$  be-

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believes  $p$  in the right kind of way, on an epistemically appropriate basis. However, although these platitudes are widely accepted, epistemologists have not arrived at any kind of consensus about how to give a plausible, counterexample-free account of the basing relation. And until we can provide an acceptable account of the basing relation, and bring it to the general epistemological consciousness, we run the risk of going awry in our other projects both within epistemology and in philosophy more generally, by assuming an incorrect picture of what it takes for a belief to be based on a reason.

Our aim in this paper is twofold. First, we aim to address Jonathan Schaffer's (2010) recent suggestion that there is a sceptical scenario, involving a "debasing" demon, that is even more powerful than Descartes' evil demon scenario. Whereas Descartes imagines a demon who could make just about any target belief false, Schaffer imagines a demon who could cause any belief to seem like it's held on a good basis, when it's really held on a bad basis. We will argue that on any plausible account of the basing relation, Schaffer's argument doesn't go through. Indeed, though other critics (Brueckner (2011), Conee (2015), Ballantyne & Evans (2013)) grant Schaffer the possibility of a debasing demon, and argue that the skeptical conclusion doesn't follow, we argue that given any plausible account of the basing relation, the debasing demon scenario isn't even possible. And second: in showing how Schaffer's argument fails, we aim to illustrate the importance of arriving at and employing a defensible account of the basing relation in our epistemic theorizing.

## 2. Causal and Doxastic Theories of the Basing Relation

It's natural to think that the basing relation must be some kind of causal relation. After all, when we hold beliefs for reasons, the reasons are why we hold the beliefs, and they're what we would appeal to in order to defend our beliefs from challenges—just as, when we perform an action for a reason, the reason is why we performed the action, and what we would appeal to in defending the action from challenges. So, presumably, if we weren't in possession of the reasons, we wouldn't hold the beliefs or perform the actions in question. So two natural accounts of the basing relation are:

*Causal (Sustaining) Account of the Basing Relation:* For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  iff  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is causally sustained by  $R$ .

*Causal (History) Account of the Basing Relation:* For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  iff  $R$  is part of the causal history leading up to  $S$ 's

belief that  $p$ <sup>1</sup>.

A quick remark about these accounts: on the face of it, the causal-sustaining account is more plausible as an account of the basing relation than its causal-history counterpart. For  $S$  might have formed the belief that  $p$  on the basis of a reason  $R$  at a time  $t$ , and then at some later time  $t+n$ ,  $S$  might forget about  $R$ , beyond the possibility of recollection. Or  $S$  might come to explicitly change her mind about whether  $R$  is a good reason for  $p$ , and thereby explicitly exclude  $R$  from her reasons for believing  $p$ . Still, there are at least two reasons for considering a causal-history account of the basing relation, in addition to a causal-sustaining account, in this context. First: provided that  $S$  hasn't explicitly ruled  $R$  out from the set of reasons for which she believes  $p$ ,  $R$  might still be part of a correct explanation of why  $S$  holds the belief that  $p$  at  $t$ , and  $R$  might therefore help provide a rational explanation of why  $S$  holds  $p$  at  $t$ , even if  $S$  has entirely forgotten about  $R$ <sup>2</sup>. And second: we aim to respond to Schaffer's debasing demon argument in this paper—and although Schaffer doesn't provide us with an account of the basing relation, a causal-history account appears to be the account that is most helpful for Schaffer's case<sup>3</sup>.

Now, these two causal accounts are natural starting-points for an account of the basing relation. But they are only starting-points, because as they stand, they face convincing counterexamples of at least two kinds. The first kind of counterexample involves deviant causal chains. For example, consider Alvin Plantinga's (1993) case:

Suddenly seeing Silvia, I form the belief that I see her; as a result, I become rattled and drop my cup of tea, scalding my leg. I then form the belief that my leg hurts; but though the former belief is a (part) cause of the latter, it is not the case that I accept the latter on the evidential basis of the former (1993: 69, n8).

This sort of case shows that something like a "non-deviant" clause would have to be added to a flat-footed causal account of basing, in order for the account to be plausible. But this is easier said than done. As Keith Allen Korcz (2015) suggests, "it is quite difficult to clearly explain what non-deviant causation amounts to, yet without such an explanation causal theories [of the basing relation] are ultimately unsatisfactory" (2015: Section 1, 3).

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1. Variations on causal theories accounts of the basing relation have been widely adopted, and sometimes defended, by recent epistemologists, e.g., Harman (1970), Swain (1981), Moser (1989), Turri (2011), and McCain (2012).

2. See Bondy (forthcoming) for elaboration of causal history and sustaining accounts.

3. Some of Schaffer's remarks indicate that he has a Causal (History) account in mind—e.g. (2010: 232): to think that I can be certain that my beliefs have not been debased is "to suppose that I have infallible access to some of the mental transitions in my past."

A possible way to supplement the Causal (Sustaining) account, to avoid the problem of causal deviance, is with Turri's (2011) causal-manifestation condition: *R* is among your reasons for believing *Q* if and only if *R*'s causing your belief manifests (at least some of) your cognitive traits (2011: 393).

Turri takes the manifestation of a disposition to be an undefined primitive. But we have a fairly good intuitive grasp on the concept, and we are able to easily apply it in a range of cases. To borrow Turri's (2011: 391) example, when a microwave heats up and boils a cup of water in normal circumstances, the microwave's boiling the water manifests its power to heat things up. But when a microwave malfunctions, sparks, causes a fire, and thereby boils the water, the microwave's boiling of the water doesn't manifest its power to heat things up.

And it seems that, in the central causal deviance counterexamples, the belief is caused or causally sustained by a reason, but the belief's being caused by the reason does not manifest a cognitive trait. In Plantinga's case, his belief that he sees Silvia is a cause of his later belief that his leg hurts, but that causal relation does not manifest a cognitive trait. (There is a cognitive trait manifested: the formation of the belief that his leg hurts manifests Plantinga's disposition to form the belief that he feels pain in a part of his body, when he is feeling pain in that part of his body. But the fact that Plantinga's belief that he sees Silvia is a cause of his later belief that he feels pain in his leg does not manifest a cognitive trait.)

So the options available for someone who wants to adopt a causal theory of the basing relation are (1) simply stipulate that it's non-deviant causal chains or causal sustaining that establishes basing relations between beliefs and reasons (which is quite unsatisfactory<sup>4</sup>), or (2) include something like Turri's cognitive-manifestation condition as a way to explain the non-deviance condition.

Causal deviance counterexamples are meant to show that *R*'s causing *S*'s belief that *p* is not, by itself, sufficient for *S*'s belief that *p* to be based on *R*. The second kind of counterexample is meant to show that causation isn't even necessary. The classic example is the superstitious-lawyer case<sup>5</sup>. The case is somewhat complicated, but Kvanvig (1985) sums it up nicely:

The counterexample concerns a [sic. superstitious] lawyer who, like the rest of his contemporaries, takes his client to be guilty. However, because

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4. Compare here a non-deviance condition on a causal theory of basing with the suggestion that knowledge must be 'non-accidentally true belief'. As Zagzebski (1996) has noted, one hasn't offered, in the face of Gettier (1963), an illuminating account of propositional knowledge by insisting that knowledge is non-accidentally true belief. More accurately, this is a kind of platitude which should guide our theorizing about knowledge. In a similar vein, the suggestion, by a proponent of the causal account of the basing relation, that the kind of causation apposite to basing must be non-deviant, should *guide* our theorizing about the basing relation.

5. Note that this particular case trades on harmful stereotypes which the authors do not agree with.

of his [sic. superstitious] nature, the lawyer is inclined to trust what the tarot cards say, and upon learning that the tarot cards say that his client is innocent, comes to believe that his client is innocent. What the tarot cards say also prompts the lawyer to re-examine the evidence, which the lawyer comes to recognize conclusively establishes that his client is innocent. However, given his rather impressionable character, the lawyer also realizes that were the sustaining power of the tarot cards removed, the sway of public opinion would cause him to be unable to see that the evidence establishes his client's innocence. Nonetheless, the lawyer now justifiably believes that his client is innocent on the basis of his examination of the evidence. But this examination of the evidence neither prompts his belief that his client is innocent nor does it sustain his belief that his client is innocent—his belief in what the tarot cards say holds the dubious distinction of being responsible for both. (1985, 153-4)

Some causal theorists bite the bullet in response to this case, and say that the lawyer isn't after all justified (e.g., Audi (1983) and Turri (2011)). This is a biting of the bullet, though, since it is very natural to think that the lawyer is justified in his belief by the available evidence.

One possible way for causal theorists to try to accommodate superstitious-lawyer cases is to add a "pseudo-overdetermination" condition to the account (Swain (1981), Bondy (Forthcoming)). Pseudo-overdetermination is a kind of counterfactual causal condition:  $S$ 's belief that  $p$ — $sBp$ —is based on reason  $R$  if  $R$  is not an actual cause of  $sBp$ , but in the close worlds where the actual cause of  $sBp$  is absent, and where  $sBp$  and  $S$  possesses  $R$ ,  $R$  is a cause of  $S$ 's belief.

It's controversial whether this condition is plausible (indeed, it is widely rejected). But we will show, in Section 4, that even a causal account that includes a pseudo-overdetermination condition will not save Schaffer's case.

So we come to the other leading type of account of the basing relation, the doxastic account. Doxastic accounts excise the need for a causal explanation of basing by shifting the importance to facts about what we believe about our evidence, as opposed to facts about what causes our beliefs. There are (at least) two ways to invoke such meta-beliefs in the account of the basing relation.

*Doxastic Account of the Basing Relation (Necessary):* For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  only if  $S$  has a meta-belief to the effect that  $R$  is a good reason to believe  $p$ .

*Doxastic Account of the Basing Relation (Sufficient):* For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  if  $S$  believes that  $R$  is a good reason to believe  $p$ .

Audi (1982) holds a view like the (Necessary) version; Ginet (1985) proposes

a view like the (Sufficient) version, in his criticism of reliabilism. The (Sufficient) version is what is perhaps most naturally suggested by the case of the superstitious-lawyer: the lawyer recognizes that he has good evidence for his belief, and so—in spite of the fact that the evidence isn't an actual cause of his belief—we naturally want to say that he bases his belief on the evidence, and his belief can therefore be doxastically justified.

There are important objections for both kinds of doxastic account<sup>6</sup>. However, just as with the causal accounts, we can set aside the question of whether the problems can be overcome, because even if the doxastic accounts can be made to work, they both prevent Schaffer's argument from going through.

### 3. Debasing Skepticism

Jonathan Schaffer (2010) has recently unveiled an epistemic demon with (he claims) the potential to threaten scepticism on a scale greater than that which Descartes himself conceived when conjuring his Deceiving Demon in the 17th Century. Schaffer calls his allegedly more virulent demon the "Debasing Demon," a demon that would threaten to undermine knowledge by attacking not the truth condition (as did Descartes' Deceiving Demon) but rather by attacking the justification condition by way of the basing requirement. The basing requirement for knowledge stipulates that, in order for one to know some proposition *p*, one must not only possess evidence for *p*, but also base one's beliefs on that evidence. Roughly, Schaffer's Debasing Demon leads one to believe on the basis

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6. One popular line of objection to doxastic accounts of the (Necessary) variety runs roughly as follows: If this kind of account is correct, then young and uneducated people who lack the concepts needed to form the appropriate meta-beliefs about their own reasons fail to base their beliefs on reasons. But young and uneducated people without the possession of such concepts can and do base their beliefs on reasons. Therefore, doxastic accounts are incorrect. This objection is not unsurmountable. As Korcz (2006: Section 3) notes, one reply—a strain of which can be found in Moser's (1989) causal account—would be to opt for either an appropriate meta belief or "some appropriate form of awareness that need not involve any particular fully developed epistemic concept." Moser calls such awareness "de re aware." An objection to the doxastic account to which an appeal to de re awareness is not useful is the objection that we sometimes base beliefs on reasons of which we are entirely unaware. To use a familiar style of example, in this case one we borrow from Peter Markie, take the proposition "The Battle of Hastings occurred in 1066." Plausibly I am justified in believing this proposition to be true. Plausibly, justification requires proper basing. If doxastic accounts of the basing relation are correct, I base this belief on reason *R* just when I have some meta-belief consisting in (roughly) the claim that *R* is a good reason for believing what I do about the Battle of Hastings. But I have no such meta-belief because I am unaware of what my reasons are for believing this ubiquitous piece of common knowledge. An objection to the (Sufficient) variety of doxastic account, due to Turri (2011), is that such accounts seem to rule out by definition the possibility that *S* might think that *R* is a good reason for believing *p*, but nevertheless decide not to base her belief that *p* on *R*. Such cases do seem to be possible.

of a guess, and then later makes it seem to one that one had believed that proposition on the basis of evidence<sup>7</sup>. What gives Schaffer the right to conjure such a demon? As Schaffer (2010: 4) sees it, this right is afforded us once we grant three seemingly uncontroversial claims:

- (S1) Knowledge requires the production of belief, properly based on the evidence.
- (S2) Any belief can be produced on an improper basis.
- (S3) It is always possible, when a belief is produced on an improper basis, for it to seem later as if one had produced a belief properly based on the evidence.

Schaffer contends that once (S1-S3) are granted, the inevitable upshot is a threat of universal doubt. Here's Schaffer (2010: 5):

Given (1-3), the following sort of doubt may arise. For any given belief, the debasing demon may ensure that it was produced on an improper basis (by (2)). She may then make it later seem to the believer as if he had produced the belief properly (by (3)). And the result is that the believer becomes debased, in that his belief fails to satisfy the basing requirement for knowledge (as per (1)). So now I might wonder, do I actually know that I have hands, or was I merely guessing?

First, a note is in order on the powerful scope of the challenge sketched here by Schaffer. Consider, in comparison, the scope for scepticism threatened by Descartes' Deceiving Demon. Not all propositions, it turned out, fell within its haunt. Most notably, knowledge of the proposition "I exist" did not appear to be threatened by the Deceiving Demon, because existence is a precondition of the very possibility of deception, and indeed of thought itself—a point Descartes keenly observed:

I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. (1984: 17)

The impotency of the Deceiving Demon with respect to the cogito owes to the fact that Deceiving Demon threatened the matter of whether we can know that the truth condition for knowledge has been satisfied—and this is a condition we can always already know a priori to be satisfied with respect to the cogito.

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7. The debasing demon throws her victims into the belief state on an improper basis, while leaving them with the impression as if they had proceeded properly. So, for instance, the debasing demon might force me into believing that I have hands on the basis of a blind guess or mere wishful thinking, while leaving me with the impression as if I had come to this belief on the basis of the visual experience.



Do we know similarly a priori that the basing relation is satisfied with respect to the cogito (or any proposition, for that matter)? Perhaps not, and this is why the Debasing Demon is supposed to be more powerful than the Deceiving Demon: for any proposition  $p$ , I might have formed  $p$  on an improper basis, and at the same time, believe (mistakenly) that the basis of  $p$  is sound.

Of course, to generate a sceptical conclusion from what Schaffer has presented here as merely an especially dangerous sceptical scenario, one must argue for additional premises. In this case, the premises would be that:

- (i) the Debasing scenario cannot be ruled out; and further,
- (ii) that it is required for knowledge that we do so.

While Pritchard (2010)<sup>8</sup> (among others) would probably deny (ii) on the grounds that that knowledge only requires that we rule out what are plausibly considered relevant alternatives, Schaffer appears to endorse (ii). He does not, however, endorse (i)—or indeed, even wrestle with the matter of whether (i) is true—and so the result of his argument should not be mistakenly thought to be the explicit avowal of a skeptical conclusion.

It is instead a particularly strong (perhaps, maximally strong) sceptical scenario, one that—if it holds—would threaten skepticism with an unrestricted scope. That enough makes Schaffer's scenario important and deserving of scrutiny: after all, the plausibility of Schaffer's case for such a scenario would provide *prima facie* leverage for the skeptic who wishes to defend (i) and (ii), creating an all-together more powerful sceptical argument than those that have been defended against before.

#### 4. Ruling out the debasing scenario: possibility

There are two key problems with the argument for debasing scepticism. The first is that the scenario Schaffer imagines, where the demon causes us to form a belief on the basis of a bad reason, and then later to think that the belief is held on the basis of a good reason, isn't even *possible*, at least on extant accounts of the basing relation. We can establish this impossibility by reductio.

Suppose that the debasing demon scenario is possible. Then (i) there is a possible world where a demon causes some subject  $S$  to believe  $p$  on the basis of a bad reason  $R_1$  at time  $t$ . And (ii) at a later time  $t_2$  the demon makes  $S$  think that his reason for believing  $p$  was a different good reason  $R_2$ <sup>9</sup>. And (iii) at  $t_2$ ,

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8. For a useful discussion of relevant as opposed to irrelevant alternatives, see Pritchard (2010); cf., Lewis (1996).

9. Schaffer does not make it explicit that  $S$  must think her reason for believing  $p$  must be a specific reason  $R_2$ ; as Schaffer sets it up, the debasing demon could perhaps cause  $S$ 's belief

it remains the case that  $S$  holds his belief only on the basis of  $R_1$ , and not on the basis of  $R_2$ . (For if  $S$  believes  $p$  at  $t_2$  on the basis of both a good reason  $R_2$  and a bad reason  $R_1$ ,  $S$ 's belief is justified by  $R_2$ , and can count as an item of knowledge. So to be a sceptical scenario, the demon must make  $S$  believe  $p$  only on the basis of  $R_1$ .)

We can now consider each of the candidate accounts of the basing relation, and show that none of them are consistent with all of (i)-(iii). So either we need to find a new and improved account of the basing relation, which will be consistent with (i)-(iii), or we should reject the supposition that the debasing demon scenario is possible.

### Doxastic (Sufficient)

According to the Doxastic (Sufficient) type of doxastic account, all it takes for  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  to be held on the basis of a reason  $R$  is that  $S$  thinks that  $R$  is a good reason for believing  $p$ . But it's explicitly included in the description of the debasing demon scenario that at  $t_2$ ,  $S$  comes to think that he holds his belief that  $p$  on the basis of the good reason  $R_2$ . So  $S$  thinks that  $R_2$  is a good reason for believing  $p$  at  $t_2$ . So according to Doxastic (Sufficient),  $S$  believes  $p$  on the basis of  $R_2$  at  $t_2$ .

### Doxastic (Necessary)

According Doxastic (Necessary), in order for  $S$  believe that  $p$  on the basis of  $R$ , it is necessary that  $S$  also believes that  $R$  is a good reason for  $p$ . But in the debasing demon scenario,  $S$  does not think at  $t_2$  that  $R_1$  is a good reason for  $p$ . So according to Doxastic (Necessary), at  $t_2$ ,  $S$  does not believe  $p$  on the basis of  $R_1$ .

### Causal (Sustaining)

According to Causal (Sustaining), as supplemented by the causal-manifestation condition,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  iff  $R$  is a causal sustainer of that be-

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that  $p$  to be based on a bad reason  $R_1$  while leaving  $S$  with the nonspecific impression that her belief that  $p$  is based on some good reason or other. But in order for the debasing demon scenario to be a sceptical threat, it must apply not only to cases where  $S$  has the nonspecific impression that there is some good basis or other for her belief that  $p$ ; it must also apply in cases where it seems to  $S$  that her belief that  $p$  is based on a specific good reason  $R_2$ . And this is no doubt what Schaffer has in mind anyway: for example, in explaining the debasing demon possibility, he claims that "I could have come to the belief that I have hands on the basis of wishful thinking, while having the false impression that I came to this belief on the basis of visual evidence" (2010: 232, italics Schaffer's). The visual evidence in question here is the specific evidence of the visual impression of having hands, not a nonspecific impression of having some evidence or other. (Thanks to a referee at *American Philosophical Quarterly* for pressing this point.)

lief, where  $R$ 's sustaining  $S$ 's belief manifests a cognitive trait of  $S$ 's. And in the debasing demon scenario, the demon causes  $S$  to think that his belief that  $p$  is based on  $R_2$  when in fact the demon makes it the case that  $S$ 's belief is sustained by  $R_1$  and not by  $R_2$ . But then  $R_1$ 's being a sustainer of  $S$ 's belief does not manifest a cognitive trait of  $S$ 's— $R_1$  sustains  $S$ 's belief in a deviant manner. It wouldn't help Schaffer's case, if we included a pseudo-overdetermination condition in the analysis of the basing relation. For one thing,  $R_1$  is already an actual cause of  $S$ 's belief, and we do not need to look to the close worlds where the actual causes of  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  are absent. And for another, if we add a pseudo-overdetermination condition to the account, it turns out that  $S$ 's belief is based on  $R_2$  at  $t_2$ . For if we take away the actual cause of  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  (we take away  $R_1$ ), but we hold constant that  $S$  believes that  $p$  and that  $S$  possesses  $R_2$ ,  $R_2$  will be a cause of  $S$ 's belief.

### Causal (History)

Causal (History), just like Causal (Sustaining), needs to be supplemented by a condition like the causal-manifestation condition, in order to overcome the causal deviance problem. So Causal (History) is inconsistent with the claim that the demon caused  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  to be based on  $R_1$  at  $t_1$ ; that was a case of causal deviance.

So it turns out that, given any of the candidate accounts of the basing relation, the debasing demon scenario isn't even possible. In the absence of an alternative account of the basing relation, then, debasing scepticism is just a non-starter.

## 5. Basing and Justifying

Suppose you are asked why you believe  $p$ . You think about this, and put forward a reason,  $R$ . What is the relationship between what you've just said,  $R$ , in justifying your belief,  $p$ , and what it is on which you count as basing your belief,  $p$ ? As Adam Leite (2004) has rightly pointed out, both causal and doxastic accounts of the basing relation answer this question in broadly the same way: the relationship is one of *independence*. He terms this widely presupposed picture the *Spectatorial Conception of the Basing Relation*.

*Spectatorial Conception*: The facts which determine basing relations are in place independently of the person's attempt to formulate a justification for her belief—her explicit deliberation, reasoning, or declaration of reasons—and are not directly determined by any of this explicit deliberative or justificatory activity.

The Spectatorial Conception<sup>10</sup> has been the dominant assumption in discussions of the basing relation since Gilbert Harman’s influential 1970 paper “Knowledge, Reasons and Causes”, in which Harman criticised<sup>11</sup> what Leite notes as the last strand of contrary thinking: Keith Lehrer’s (1965) Gettier-response paper in which Lehrer defined basing in terms of what one would say to justify one’s belief<sup>12</sup>.

For the last half-century, then, the overwhelming presumption has been that, for the purposes of establishing the justifiedness of a given belief with reference to basing, the activity of justifying is itself epistemically inert. The activity of justifying has been thought of, to take Leite’s analogy, more akin to “showing or reporting that one has won a game” as opposed to “achieving a checkmate.”

The Spectatorial Conception of the basing relation, in short, places a metaphysical “wedge” between (i) the basing relation, and (ii) the *activity* of justifying, by regarding “facts that determine basing relations [as] not directly determined by ... explicit deliberative or justificatory activity.” The simple picture is:

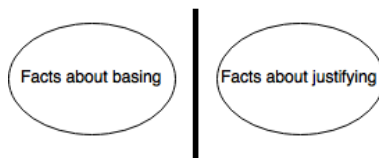


Figure 1. Spectatorial Conception

Interestingly, it is precisely this “wedge” between justifying and basing which, on the Spectatorial Conception, provides the conditions for the very possibility

10. Consider, as Leite does, William Alston’s (2005: 7) suggestion that “the state [pertaining to being justified] is the more basic one, since the activity of justifying is an activity directed to showing that a belief is in the state of being justified” (2005: 7). Even Robert Audi (1993), who champions the doxastic account of the basing relation, holds this line firmly in his suggestion that one’s being justified in a belief stands independent from any ability to justify the belief (1993: 145).

11. Harman (1970) writes: “People often believe things for good reasons, which give them knowledge, even though they cannot say what those reasons are ... In most cases a person is unable to state his reasons in any sort of detail. At best he can give only the vaguest indication of the reasons that convince him. It is only in rare cases that we can tell a person’s reasons from what he can say about them. Indeed, it is doubtful that a person can ever fully identify his reasons” (1970: 844). Harman adds further that “When a person wonders whether a consideration represents one of his reasons, he wonders whether that consideration influenced his conclusion. But that is to wonder whether it has anything to do with why he believes as he does, with the explanation of his belief” (1970: 845).

12. Although Lehrer’s (1965) central objective in “Knowledge, Truth and Evidence” was to argue for a fourth condition on knowledge, he claims early on in the paper, in his discussion of the well-known Mr. Nogot and Mr. Havit case—that, as Leite notes “a belief is not based upon particular reasons if the person would not appeal to those reasons to justify his belief.”

for Schaffer's debasing demon to operate. On this point, a brief analogy to the Gettier problem is useful. As Zagzebski (1994) pointed out, the conditions for the possibility of Gettier cases are furnished by the logical gap between justification and truth; so long as justification doesn't entail truth (viz., so long as the satisfaction of these conditions are independent of one another), there is space to construct Gettier cases.

Likewise, so long as the facts which determine basing relations are in place independently of our activity of justifying, there is open space for Schaffer's demon, a demon which preys, epistemically speaking, on an independence between (i) what your basis of your belief is and (ii) what you sincerely put forward as the basis for your belief.

Famously, in the case of Gettier problems, simply closing the logical gap is easier said than done. One can after all close this gap between justification and truth only by eliminating the possibility of justified false beliefs<sup>13</sup>. Interestingly, though, there is one way, intimated by Leite, to close the gap between justifying and basing—a way which would effectively undercut the possibility conditions for Schaffer's debasing demon—with no such analogous negative theoretical costs. Simply close up the alleged independence between justifying and basing by having facts about the latter depend in some significant way on facts about the former. Consider the following picture, which we can call (in contrast to the Spectatorial Conception) the *Justificationist Conception*, according to which what you count as basing your belief on is fixed by the activity of justifying.

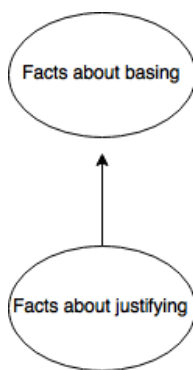


Figure 2. Justificationist Conception

We've already suggested (i.e., in Section 4) that, on extant proposals of the basing relation, Schaffer's debasing demon is a *de facto* impossibility. The Spectatorial Conception is a precondition for the possibility of Schaffer's demon. Thus, if we have reason to prefer the Justificationist Conception to the Spectatorial Conception, we have a further, principled reason to discount the possibility of

13. Zagzebski (1994: 72).

Schaffer's scenario. And moreover, we'll have cause to rethink what is a foundational assumption about basing that both causal and doxastic theorists take for granted. *Question*: do we have reason to prefer the Justificationist Conception to the Spectatorial Conception?

Here it is helpful to distinguish between what we can call *strong* and *weak* versions of the Justificationist Conception.

*Justificationist Conception<sub>Strong</sub>* (JC<sub>Strong</sub>): For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  at  $t$  if, and only if,  $S$  sincerely declares  $R$  as  $S$ 's reason for  $p$  at  $t$ .

*Justificationist Conception<sub>Weak</sub>* (JC<sub>Weak</sub>): For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  at  $t$  only if  $S$  sincerely declares  $R$  as  $S$ 's reason for  $p$  at  $t$ .

Though Leite himself defends a version of (JC<sub>Strong</sub>)<sup>14</sup>, all that's really needed to close off the possibility conditions for Schaffer's demon is (JC<sub>Weak</sub>). And so we can recast the question: do we have reason to prefer (JC<sub>Weak</sub>) to the (more widely embraced) Spectatorial Conception? We want to conclude by sketching two reasons in the affirmative.

The first is a twist on Leite's normativity argument, which he appeals to in defending a version of (JC<sub>Strong</sub>). But the argument can be redeployed as follows to support (JC<sub>Weak</sub>) over the Spectatorial Conception. The argument begins with the premise that when one sincerely declares, after reflection upon the available reasons, "these are the reasons for my belief," one is not merely issuing a hypothesis (as one would be doing when offering an explanatory reason), but instead taking up a normative position, one which opens us up to epistemic criticism and further normative consequences<sup>15</sup>. If the Spectatorial Conception of the basing relation is correct, then asserting one's reasons for one's belief is merely issuing a hypothesis, not taking up a normative position. Therefore, contrary to the Spectatorial Conception, justifying is not irrelevant to basing (even if, contra (JC<sub>Strong</sub>), it is not exhaustive of basing). And if justifying is not irrelevant to basing, this is better explained by (JC<sub>Weak</sub>) than it is by the Spectatorial Conception.

The second argument, which builds upon the first, has to do with cognitive bias. Stipulate that  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  have all the same beliefs, but that they have acquired these beliefs in a different order, so that  $S_2$  has learned about the total occurrences of a crime,  $C$ , more recently than  $S_1$  has. Suppose further that  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  learn that a crime has just been committed. Plausibly—due to the avail-

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14. See Leite (2004).

15. As Leite points out, there is something incoherent, or Moore-paradoxical, about sincerely asserting that " $q$  is the reason upon which my belief that  $p$  is based, but  $q$  is a lousy reason for believing that  $p$ ."

ability heuristic<sup>16</sup> to which we can stipulate  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are equally susceptible in general— $S_2$  is more likely to base his belief that the crime that has just been committed is  $C$  on his beliefs about the occurrence of  $C$  than  $S_1$  is. But this is better explained by  $(JC_{Weak})$  than by the Spectatorial Conception. After all, the intuitive difference between  $S_1$ 's and  $S_2$ 's basing in this circumstance is best explained by  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  being inclined to offer different justifications than by a proposal (i.e., the Spectatorial Conception) on which the justifications they are inclined to offer are themselves irrelevant to basing.

It's worth emphasizing at this point that it's possible for us to fail at the activity of justifying our beliefs. When we sincerely affirm that our belief that  $p$  is based on reason  $R$ , we take on a commitment to the goodness of  $R$  as a reason for believing  $p$ . But of course it might turn out that  $R$  is a lousy reason for  $p$ . So the claim that the activity of justifying is relevant to the basing relation should not be read as the claim that the activity of successfully justifying is what's relevant to the basing relation; unjustified beliefs can be held on the basis of reasons too.

Now,  $(JC_{Weak})$  is one half of the biconditional in Leite's  $(JC_{Strong})$ .  $(JC_{Weak})$  closes off the possibility of the debasing demon scenario, because it entails that at  $t_1$ ,  $S$  doesn't believe on the basis of the bad reason  $R_1$ . And  $(JC_{Weak})$  is incompatible with the Spectatorial Conception, because that was just the view that facts about basing are independent of what a person would declare to be the reasons on the basis of which she holds her beliefs. If in all cases where  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is held on the basis of reason  $R$ ,  $S$  must sincerely declare  $R$  to be a reason for which that belief is held, and  $S$  must thereby take on a normative commitment to the quality of  $R$  as a reason for believing  $p$ , then the Spectatorial Conception is entirely misguided. But, for anyone who thinks that there is something fundamentally right about what motivates the Spectatorial Conception, we can consider also the other half of  $(JC_{Strong})$ , which we might call " $(JC_{Weak}^*)$ ":

*Justificationist Conception<sub>Weak\*</sub>*  $(JC_{Weak}^*)$ : For  $S$ ,  $p$ , reason  $R$ ,  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is based on  $R$  at  $t$  if  $S$  sincerely declares  $R$  as  $S$ 's reason for  $p$  at  $t$ .

This principle also rules out the debasing demon, because it entails that at  $t_2$ ,  $S$  believes that  $p$  on the basis of the good reason  $R_2$ <sup>17</sup>. And note that  $(JC_{Weak}^*)$

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16. This is the well-documented tendency of individuals to overestimate the likelihood of events which have been recently considered or stored in memory. See, for example, Tversky & Kahneman (1973) for a representative discussion.

17. Could Schaffer's demon simply make it falsely seem to us, at  $t$ , that we are sincerely declaring  $R$  as our reason at  $t$ , when in fact we are not doing this? If so, does this undermine the effectiveness of  $(JC_{Weak}^*)$  as a means of closing off possibility conditions for Schaffer's demon? The answer, in both cases, is 'no'. This is for two reasons, the first reason is definitional, the second philosophical. Firstly, the definitional point is that Schaffer's demon is clearly defined. It is not a demon with the power to make all occurrent believings opaque to one, in such a way

allows that, when  $S$  doesn't have any declared opinion about her reasons for believing that  $p$ , the facts about what her belief is based on can be fixed by factors independent of what  $S$  sincerely declares to be her reasons for believing that  $p$ . So, although  $(JC_{Weak*})$  is incompatible with the letter of the Spectatorial Conception (allowing, as it does, what a person declares about her reasons to directly determine what her belief is actually based on), it is compatible with its spirit. In particular,  $(JC_{Weak*})$  allows small children and animals, who are presumably too conceptually unsophisticated to be able to declare anything about and take on commitments regarding the quality of the reasons for their beliefs, to nevertheless have reasons for their beliefs. And it allows that we sophisticated adults can hold beliefs on the basis of reasons even when we are entirely unreflective about the reasons for which we hold them.  $(JC_{Weak*})$  simply claims that when we make sincere declarations about the reasons for which we hold our beliefs, that is an overriding factor, which establishes a basing relation. And just like  $(JC_{Weak})$ ,  $(JC_{Weak*})$  respects the intuition that when we make declarations about our reasons, we take on normative commitments regarding the quality of our reasons. But  $(JC_{Weak*})$  should be palatable to those who are not willing to give up on what motivates the Spectatorial Conception<sup>18</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

Schaffer's debasing skepticism argument offers a fascinating challenge, though one which warrants an undercutting, rather than a rebutting, response. We've argued that, at least on the most popular extant accounts of the basing relation—

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that, for anything  $x$  which you think you are believing, at  $t$ , you might not be believing  $x$  at  $t$ . It is not our objective to argue against the possibility of a demon with such a different power, further to those Schaffer has invested in his own debasing demon. This brings us to our second response. Let's suppose for the sake of argument that Schaffer's debasing demon actually did have this further power, a power to—let's say—blend appearance and reality throughout the fabric of one's cognitive life, so that one might always be wrong about what belief one is having, what content one is declaring, etc. The demon, suppose, makes it seem to one, at  $t$ , that one is sincerely declaring a reason,  $R$ , as one's reason for  $p$ , at  $t$ , when in fact one is not doing this. Note that even on this assumption, no important implication follows for the point we've made about  $(JC_{Weak*})$ . This is because  $(JC_{Weak*})$  is a claim about what sincerely believing on a reason suffices for, namely basing. Even if—as would be if we were imperilled by this further demon—we might be mistaken about what we sincerely believe, the proponent of  $(JC_{Weak*})$  can remind us that the claim advanced is about what follows from one's actually sincerely believing some reason is a reason for one's belief. Put another way,  $(JC_{Weak*})$  could be true even if we could be mistaken about whether the antecedent holds. Thanks to a referee for requesting further discussion on this point.

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viz., those canvassed in Section 2—the debasing demon scenario cannot possibly get off the ground. We suggested, further, a plausible explanation for why the debasing demon scenario seems nonetheless compelling. A condition for the possibility of the debasing demon scenario is that facts which determine basing relations are in place independently of an individual’s attempt to formulate a justification for her belief. Leite (2004) calls this the Spectatorial Conception of the basing relation, and it is one which is widely held by both proponents of causal and doxastic accounts of basing. We concluded by challenging this picture in favour of one according to which the activity of justifying is itself relevant to basing. Schaffer’s debasing demon is not merely *de facto* impossible on extant views but, moreover, will be impossible on any plausible account of the role of justifying to basing.

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